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WASHINGTON ART ASSOCIATION EXHIBITION.



THE effort to establish a "National Gallery of Art" at Washington City, still is an experiment. The purpose is a most commendable one; but Washington is so

far from the greater Art-centre, New-York, that we fear artists here will not generally co-operate with the movement. The collection, this year, embraced many good things—some of which are in the Academy of Design Exhibition, now open in this city. The National Intelligencer referred to the Washington collection as follows:

"It is an undoubted improvement on the last exhibition; more varied and spirited as a whole. We hastily notice now a very few paintings of the most conspicuous merit, thus: Kensett's almost wonderful 'October day in the White Mountains;' Weber's 'Scene on the Ohio;' Church's 'Twilight on Lake George;' Hazeltine's 'View of the Mountains on the Rhine;' Richards' 'Morning in the Adirondac Mountains;' Lewis's 'View near the White Mountains;' Mignot's 'Autumnal Scene;' and two very large pictures from Swiss scenery, 'the Jung-Frau Alps,' and the 'Lauterbrunnen.' We ought not to omit a picture descriptive of the battle of Bunker's Hill, in which great spirit and vigor are displayed. A portrait of a lady, by Greene, is indeed admirable."

Hon. Job R. Tyson delivered the opening lecture, from which we may quote, briefly. After alluding to the discouraging circumstances attending the enterprise—to the financial depression which crushed out art-patronage, he proceeded to extol the patriotic purpose of making a repository of art for the genius of the country, in its national metropolis, amidst the memorials of our greatness, whither the home student and the foreign tourist repair for glimpses of the taste and intellect of the nation. Here all the peculiarities of our people are exhibited, here art is diversified by the varieties of climate and varying conditions of society, and here an impartial and cultivated judgment

should express, in candid criticism, its chastening and improving verdict.

Mr. Tyson assumed that every citizen desired that the national capital should reveal the evidences of a high civilization, and would feel a just pride in realizing that the grace and beauty surrounding him were the achievements of his own countrymen. In all ages, the artist has been cherished by his own government, or by its sovereign princes and nobles. Without such aid the fine arts have ever languished. But we have no imperial or patrician rank, no law of primogeniture, no permanent class to whom the artist may look for patronage. The fostering aid of the legislature, and the appreciation of a schooled and reading people, are his only resources; and he must turn to these in competition with the continual and pressing demands for the development of vast and unexplored physical resources.

Practical knowledge, the colossal machinery of government, and the ordinary industrial pursuits, absorb so much of the devotion challenged for the beauties of art, that we may even wonder at the efforts of taste we behold in decoration, architecture, landscape gardening, statuary, and painting; for it requires the co-operation of artificial convenience and mental culture with wealth, luxury, and leisure, to excite the poetic sentiment essential to a general appreciation of artistic genius in its higher manifestations. These truths were eloquently sustained by parallels derived from the history of ancient Greece and Rome, and the prosperity of art in modern Rome. The deficiencies of practical England, with respect to the fine arts, were dwelt upon, and a beautiful tribute was rendered to the brief catalogue of artists who have adorned the annals of this land, of high achievement and practical wisdom, whose genius has illuminated science and literature, and from whom we have derived better lessons and qualities than Italy could have afforded us.

In America, the native taste has been quickened, to a limited extent, by cultivation, and private wealth has been liberal to art. But the number of persons of elegant taste and leisure is small; few models of excellence exist; no standard of taste prevails, and the merits of a candidate are often decided by caprice or whim, partiality or ill-nature. This the artist sustains in his unaided struggles, and with a mind ill-fortified by discipline to endure it. A mind dwelling upon beauty

in its varied forms, hence contracts a disgust for every-day existence, and acquires a taste for factitious elegance irreconcilable with the struggle for bread, and prosperity is rarely attained until the lengthened shadows of life announce its decline.

The speaker maintained that they err who suppose that the artist has but few subjects of study in this country. Of superior specimens of art we have enough to restrain the license and rectify the errors of genius, without repressing its originality. The eventful history and the majestic scenery of our country should afford ample inspiration. With themes so novel and suggestive, painting and sculpture may here form a school free from subjection to foreign ideas. The independent spirit of Benjamin West, an American artist, led him to the practical adoption of a conception that inaugurated a new era of art in England.

After the recital of numerous historic instances, and some of them of a ludicrous character, illustrative of the unequal conflict of merit and rank in Europe, Mr. Tyson said that it is merit which here commands the avenues to distinction, wealth and fame. Where nature has done her part, diligence and honor will do the rest. He also descanted upon the practice of visiting Italy to acquire the arts, and, with them, the frivolities and vices, of that artificial land—an experience which he did not regard as necessary for those whom nature had favored, quoting the couplet:

"How much a fool who has been sent to Rome,
Exceeds a fool who has been kept at home."

But diligence, as well as genius, must combine with a benignant nature, to produce a great artist. "No day without a line," was the maxim to which Apelles rose.

The imitation of nature, transferring not merely the lineaments but the expressive life and soul, is no mean achievement; but the pencil may combine objects in action, and so dispose the parts as to evolve the complications of an intricate narrative, or it may create scenes beyond the effect of language. Thus the sculptor or painter is essentially a poet, and capable of uttering the most pungent satire, the most delicate irony, the severest libel, or the highest praise. It is also within his compass to depict the grandest conceptions of the human mind, in corresponding proportions of beauty and majesty, and to reveal

them in fearful aspects of terror and sublimity.

The speaker, after paying a merited tribute to Copley and Allston, entered upon a vindication of Benjamin West, and pointed out the political influences which led to his disparagement in England. He dwelt with emphasis upon the merits of this painter, whose simple monument he had seen in St. Paul's Cathedral, in London, with its meagre inscription. West had sat for many years on the throne of British art; but, while the marble which covers his ashes has no soothing word of regret or commendation, the monuments of artists around him are loud in eulogy. But marvellous changes had taken place in the sentiment of England between the period when West was received with honor, previous to our Revolution, and that of his death, after our independence; yet it is still more marvelous that American writers and American opinion were, even then, under the slavish influence of the British press. The mists of prejudice, however, have passed away in both countries, and both countries rejoice in his fame.

A brief account of the character and excellence of some of the paintings of West was given; but the speaker dwelt chiefly upon his transcendent composition of "Death on the Pale Horse." The difficulties over which this great artist triumphed; his life of moral and religious purity; his manners as a polished gentleman; his cordiality of feeling and generosity—were eloquently presented for approval and emulation. The audience, and especially the artists among them, were pointedly informed that he was a stranger to professional jealousy; that he assisted the meritorious; that the state of art in his own country lay near his heart; and that the formation of an academy of art in Philadelphia engaged his countenance and sympathy.

Mr. Tyson, in conclusion, earnestly commended the example of this distinguished man, in all these characteristics, to the study and imitation of American artists, and said that he hoped an institution like this might concentrate the scattered rays of the talent of his countrymen, and that, whether called upon in the beautiful province of statuary, or the lofty fields of pictorial art, its judgment might be impartially pronounced and its rewards faithfully distributed.

THE SCULPTOR PALMER.

THE fame of this great artist advances with each added work of his hands. Purely a native-born genius, his handiwork is peculiarly original, and yet marvelously perfect, as if he had long and closely studied Greek form and modern spiritual expression, and to these added his own individual impression of the beautiful. He has made little study of ancient or modern marble, for he has *not* "been abroad"—all his power and grace came from the intuition of his own self-reliant and well poised genius. Whatever he is, or may be, it can never be said "he copies this or that master"—he is his own master, and owes nothing to tuition—his success comes from intuition.

Anson G. Chester, Esq., lately visited Mr. Palmer's studio, and writes thus of the man and sculptor:

"As a man, Palmer is a superior specimen of his kind. He is thoroughly democratic in appearance and manners. His greatness is twinned by modesty. But when you observe his noble and massive head, his large, amiable face, and his intelligent and enthusiastic expression, you feel that no common person stands before you. In conversation he is earnest and genial; in information rich; in argument subtle; in illustration affluent. He talks ripplingly and musically, and his smile is as cordial and as golden as the smile of the morning. It is a peculiar smile—one that comes from the habit, perhaps, of viewing his own beautiful, and peaceful, and heavenly creations. At least we could not help thinking so.

"As a sculptor, Palmer is bound to head the native-born list. Next to Crawford in some things, he is the superior of the illustrious dead in others. He has more sentiment than Crawford had, and puts himself into his creations more than Crawford did. He is less stilted and less severe than Powers. Palmer is an original artist; a bold, enthusiastic and devoted artist, whose whole soul is in his duty, and who counts toil and weariness as nothidg, so that he may honor the art thereby. With Angelo, he holds that 'trifles make perfection, and that perfection is no trifle.' We verily believe that he cares more for his mistress—which is his Art—to-day, than he cares for himself. He loses self in enthusiasm—an enthusi-

asm which does not warm like a fire, but rather glows like a furnace.

"We cannot linger to speak of the many exquisite productions which we found in Palmer's studio, but must mention some. There was an ideal head of the Law-Giver, which chained our gaze for the first half hour—and such a head! Its conception betrayed the true-born Poet as its execution did the dainty-fingered sculptor. There was "Resignation," too, bearing

—'The look of Heaven upon her brow,
Which limners give to the beloved disciple.'

"There was an idealized head of the sculptor's favorite child—so surpassingly beautiful that even Nature herself was shamed; and a *basso relievo* of 'Faith,' meet for its use—to teach the living in the place of the dead. But, above all, was a model, a simulacrum, of 'The White Captive'—intended as a companion to Palmer's glorious statue of 'The Indian Girl'—a life-size female figure, entirely nude. The right arm of the statue is bound, by the wrist, to a tree; the left arm is placed behind the back. This is a bold step in advance of custom and conventionalism, but it is one which we can but approve. In most female figures wrought by the sculptor's chisel there is some attitude or appliance indicative of conscious shame. In this there is nothing of the sort. And why should there be? Eve's modesty was her original inheritance. When she was pure she knew not she was naked. It was guilt that set her to sewing fig-leaves and creating a covering for herself. We take the ground that the position of the hand in the *Venus de Medici* and in the Greek Slave, is more immodest than otherwise. Let him who thinketh evil himself be responsible for the thought, and not charge his baseness upon an innocent block of marble. We cordially commend Palmer for his independence in this direction. If the world is not extra squeamish, this one manly innovation will be the making of him. The statue, as such—for we have referred to but one of its excellences—promises to rank among Palmer's greatest triumphs. This is praise meet for a god, but honesty prompts the utterance. The attitude, the play of muscle, the delicate moulding, the expression of the features,

'All are but parts of one' most perfect 'whole.'

Were we a sculptor's wife we should cer-